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RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ALMATY PRIORITY 9833
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY BAKU PRIORITY 0084
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RUEHNT/AMEMBASSY TASHKENT PRIORITY 2592
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 000674

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TAGS: AF PGOV PK PREL PTER
SUBJECT: G.G. ON JIRGAS

REF: ISLAMABAD 650

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Peter W. Bodde, Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

¶11. (C) Summary. Minister of Culture Dr. Ghazi Gulab (G.G.) Jamal, a key member of Pakistan's jirga commission, told us February 7 that, when representatives of the two commissions meet later in February, key topics for discussion will include: to whom to issue jirga invitations; the scope of the jirga's authority; and the jirga's enforcement powers. Jamal stated -- as have other Embassy contacts -- that if Punjabis or Sindhis participate in the meeting, Pashtuns will strongly oppose calling the event a "jirga." He also warned that no matter how well planned, at least some participants will inevitably bring up the Durand Line or Pashtun independence. He postulated that such "Pandora's Box" issues created greater angst in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. End summary.

¶12. (C) In a February 7 conversation with poloffs, Minister of Culture (and Jirga Commission member) Dr. G.G. Jamal reviewed the challenges facing those charged with moving ahead on the September 27 White House Iftar proposal for a Pak-Afghan jirga. While the minister displayed a sophisticated understanding of both sides, need to be seen taking steps toward peace and stability -- and acknowledged the potential benefits of a parallel or cross-border meeting in building confidence and hope -- Jamal, like other Embassy contacts, stressed that the decision to hold a "jirga" had been made without understanding Pakistani Pashtun jirga traditions. Pakistani Pashtun jirgas he explained, convene to decide specific questions, such as a person's guilt or innocence, how much compensation a family or tribe owed a counterpart, or how to resolve a tribal conflict. It was unclear to Jamal how the parallel jirgas, or even a cross-border jirga, would define a specific question to be resolved. The other critical component of Pashtun jirgas, he said, was the unquestioned authority of the jirga to issue a "waqt", an enforceable verdict that all participants were obligated to respect.

¶3. (C) Jamal said the Pakistani Commission was not contrarian, but rather wanted to "listen to the Afghan concept and plans" before agreeing to move forward. Jamal said that Pakistan's Jirga Commission Chair, Interior Minister Aftab Sherpao, had already extended an invitation to Afghan Commission Chair Pir Gailani for a meeting later in February to discuss the Pakistani and Afghan ideas and reservations as a "first step" (Reftel). He said the date was not yet established.

The "Pandora,s Box" Problem

¶4. (C) Jamal worried that jirga participants might bring up issues related to the Durand Line or even Pashtun independence. Such a risk made careful analysis of the invitation list crucial, especially for Pakistan, to whom discussion of the Durand Line was anathema. A friend of Jamal's from the Tribal Areas, who was present at the meeting, was even more blunt: "What if the jirga decides that both governments must leave the area?" he asked. "What will happen?" Jamal replied that, while he thought the debate could be controlled, he was sure that someone would bring up the Durand Line at the jirga and that, under Pashtun tradition, the jirga would be obliged to discuss the matter.

Let's Not Call This A Jirga

¶5. (C) Poloff asked Jamal if Pakistani Pashtuns would agree to calling an event a jirga if Punjabis and Sindhis were

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present. He bluntly answer "no." (Comment: -- Every Pashtun we have asked gives the same answer. End Comment.) Jamal said another name probably could be developed, although he could not think of an appropriate Pashtun word or institution. That said, he also expressed some concern that Pashtuns would find it inappropriate for Punjabis or Sindhis to be participating in a jirga-like meeting to discuss events in Pashtun areas.

¶6. (C) Comment. We do not believe Pakistan is purposefully blocking the Pak-Afghan Jirga. As Jamal notes, serious issues must be discussed and evaluated. If the jirgas occur without adequate planning or without anticipating potential negative outcomes, they would be counterproductive. Indeed, if the issue of Pashtun independence becomes a primary point of debate, Pakistan and Afghanistan could find themselves in a tougher predicament than the unenviable position they are already in. End comment.

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